

Report on Troubled States

3756. SHRI MUKUL BALKRISHNA WASNIK: Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

(a) whether a team from the Press Council of India has prepared a report on the state of the media in the two troubled States of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab;

(b) if so, the recommendations made in the report; and

(c) the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (KUMARI GIRIJA VYAS): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The main recommendations on Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab are annexed in statement and marked with the letter 'A' & 'B' respectively.

(c) Government have noted the recommendations.

STATEMENT A***Recommendations on Kashmir Committee of the Press Council of India***

Media personnel and especially those with key responsibilities for editing, directing, reporting and programming or who are otherwise exposed and vulnerable must receive protection especially if solicited by media organisations or authorised media representatives.

2. There can however be no total security and newsmen must be willing to accept the risks that go with their profession. This may require careful selection or replacement or rotation of personnel as the case may be, and full institutional support.

3. Identity cards and curfew passes must be honoured at all times by security personnel. Even if media persons are to be searched or held for

questioning, they must not be humiliated or ill-treated in any way and their offices must be promptly informed.

4. Media persons working under hazardous conditions or on perilous assignments should receive special incentives; separation and travel allowances where dual establishments have to be maintained; generous group insurance cover; and such other disturbance allowances, additional leave or other benefits to which they may be entitled or as may be appropriate. Special group insurance policies are reportedly now available or should be negotiated with Government's assistance.

5. Compensation should be paid in case of death, injury, hospitalisation or loss of property, and employment assistance or pensions should be provided to next of kin.

6. Where necessary, arrangements should be made for transport and housing in relatively safer locations or in clusters, specially for those required to work at odd hours.

7. Newsmen and newspapers should report all sides and aspects of events fairly and objectively, citing sources, verifying facts, providing necessary contextual background and, where possible, offering their own eyewitness observations, analysis or interpretation without editorialising. Such professional rigour at all time, on whichever side of the barricades, is proper and more likely than otherwise to ensure personal and institutional safety.

8. Newspapers and news agencies should ensure that experienced hands are posed in Kashmir which is a challenging assignment and entails working under stress. The news agencies have a special responsibility as they service the entire national press and, without casting any personal aspiration, need to avoid arrangements such as UNI's in Jammu where the long-standing appointment of a leading local editor as Bureau chief could result in a conflict of interest.

9. There has been an unfortunate polarisation in the media on communal and regional lines which is wholly out of keeping with past tradition. This trend must be reversed through conscious efforts at many levels. A free and objective press cannot flourish in a climate of distrust.

10. Mere criticism by papers of official policies and attitudes and the fact that some local correspondents write for Pakistani papers or other foreign journals or agencies should be no grounds for suspicion. The fact that the local press and local newsmen are under militant pressure must also be kept in mind and their difficulties appreciated.

11. The concept of "objectionable writing" must be clearly defined and understood. If genuinely objectionable matter is to be curbed, pre-censorship is not the answer. This should be scrupulously avoided. The remedy lies in taking action under the ordinary law of the land with suitable appellate procedures. It would be desirable, if the Press Council were to be informed of all such cases.

12. The most horrific events can be narrated with restraint and should be portrayed or displayed with sobriety so as not to exacerbate tensions at a time when passions may already be ruling high. Stereotypes can be most unfair, with connotations of guilt by association. In all matters there must be a careful sense of proportion and discretion in evaluating sources and incidents and assessing motivations, and likewise in sifting rumour and disinformation from hard news.

13. Corrections, contradictions and clarifications should be published and the authorities need to be far more diligent and enterprising in reaching their version to newspapers or correcting distortions and placing things in context.

14. The present mechanisms for media briefing are too slow and unsatisfactory. A single-time police release by the DGP, an exceedingly busy officer whose primary task cannot be attending on the media, is wholly inadequate. Kashmir requires a high-level Media Spokesman with full access to all information and decision-making processes in Srinagar, Jammu and Delhi and the necessary authority and discretion to brief the media and conduct media relations within a larger, overall media strategy in formulating and executing which he must be a prime mover.

15. Such an official and his aides should be accessible and have the necessary wherewithal to provide newsmen greater access to a wider range of information than just security-related issues and to facilitate movement to the spot, including border and other distant locations. A helicopter and some jeeps should be dedicated for these tasks.

16. The appointment of a Media Spokesman, as suggested, should not preclude media access to the Governor, Advisers, DGP and other responsible officers.

17. The Media Spokesman should interact with the Kashmir Editors Conference, the IFWJ (Kashmir Unit), the Kashmir Journalists Conference and other professional bodies which could be instrumental in reviving the Press Advisory Council. This would be an appropriate forum for discussing issues or grievances pertaining to advertisements, newsprint, assistance to small papers and the like, as well as larger policy matters.

18. The State Inter-Media Publicity Co-ordination Committee should be more purposefully used and its status upgraded under the leadership of the proposed Media Spokesman.

19. Development news and human interest stories should be encouraged and facilitated by the authorities and by Editors and Broadcast Directors.

20. Newspapers, in turn, should brief their News Editors and gatekeepers about priorities, display, headlines, photographs, and the importance of so-called "soft" stories. They should encourage their field staff by personal visits or by sending out senior colleagues to assess the situation on the ground.

21. The local press, national correspondents and wire services in the Valley and Jammu should be given priority in coverage of events in J&K. The policy of having Jammu preempt Srinagar and allowing Delhi to preempt both in terms of important announcements or coverage is misplaced and demoralising to those who are nearer the ground reality, expected to take the risks, and are then excluded in favour of "outsiders".

22. There is however every reason to hold suitable briefings at various levels in Delhi as well for the national and international press. This too is something that could be co-ordinated by the Media Spokesman referred to earlier.

23. The Radio Kashmir and Door-darshan newsrooms should return to Srinagar immediately. This is overdue and any seeming risks can be overcome with suitable planning and staffing arrangements. The local broadcast personnel should not be made to feel inadequate or suspect.

STATEMENT B

1. There can be no absolute security though every effort must be made to improve the general security environment. Within that framework newsmen in Punjab must be prepared to accept the hazards that go with their calling and their commitment to freedom of the press which embodies the citizen's right to know.

2. Nevertheless, reasonable security must be provided to media personnel in their offices and, where so desired, in cluster-housing complexes.

3. If particularly hazardous locations are temporarily made non-

family stations, special family and travel allowances should be provided.

4. Compensation should be paid for death, injury or hospitalisation or loss of property with assurance of jobs/pensions to next of kin.

5. All media personnel in hazardous zones should be covered under group insurance. Newspaper organisations should consult with the Government in persuading LIC and GIC to issue special risk insurance policies.

6. Night duty staff should be dropped home under armed guard whenever the situation so warrants.

7. Newsmen should fairly present all sides of any given event or situation and verify the facts and not depend on hearsay or speculation when it comes to body counts and other important factors.

8. News should be properly sourced and there should be no editorialising in news copy.

9. The most horrendous and sensitive events can be legitimately published with sobriety, using restrained language and headlines, avoiding excessive display or sensationalism so as not to heighten fears and tensions.

10. Bandh notices and press notes from ultras should be edited and played down while positive developments should be mentioned and even highlighted as occasion demands.

11. News agencies and newspapers should select personnel for sensitive and hazardous assignments with care and rotate them as a means of easing pressure on any one individual. Fresh minds are also able to view old problems and situations in a new perspective.

12. The news agencies need to strengthen their regional news units in Chandigarh and place them under senior men. Newspapers too should ensure that they have senior and highly responsible gatekeepers on duty to handle sensitive copy from

sensitive beats. "Peace time" levels of manning and procedures are not suited to "War time" situations.

13. AIR and Doordarshan must appoint station directors at Jalandhar and Chandigarh and ensure that all vacancies are filled, and filled with imaginative and innovative personnel.

14. There should be highly mobile video and audio teams able to move to any part of the state and an hour's notice, possibly with helicopter support so that live coverage can be used to good purpose.

15. Punjab (and Kashmir) needs a high level media spokesman who can speak on his own with the full authority of the Governor and the Director-General Police. Such a person should be fully briefed or be able to command or procure all information or authentication. This officer or agency should have a presence in key centres such as Jalandhar and Amritsar in addition to Chandigarh.

16. The Centre must evolve a coherent and comprehensive media for this purpose and establish a high-power, multi-disciplinary media strategy cell for strategy for Punjab (and Kashmir). Terrorism or insurgency cannot be fought only with guns but require a just administration and ideas that can win the hearts and minds of men and women against the ideological onslaught of those who out to subvert the state. Professionals must be used and there is no reason to place exclusive reliance on existing official personnel or media talent.

17. The Punjab Press Relations Committee should be expanded into a Media Relations Committee, including AIR and Doordarshan. This should meet regularly in different major news centres so that members are sensitised to local conditions and preceptions and can communicate directly with field staff.

18. Editors and associations of professional newsmen and of owners/managements should concert measures

to understand the ground realities and extend support of field staff.

19. The free circulation of foreign journals like *Des Pardes*, *Wanger* and so on from London and other centres abroad should be restricted or prosecuted if they contain subversive or seditious material. Large numbers of these magazines are currently coming in by post and being selectively distributed.

20. There should be no resort to censorship, however limited, or suspension of publication by newspapers as sometime suggested. While terrorists thrive on the "oxygen of publicity" (Mrs. Thatcher), the regulatory remedies that create a media vacuum could be worse than the disease. There is no need for any special press law in Punjab nor would this be desirable. Where necessary, errant newspapers or newsmen can be prosecuted under the law of the land or cases may be referred to the Press Council which would, however, need to evolve a fast track for dealing with such situations. Ajit was prosecuted but the case was later not pressed. This and similar cases should be reviewed to see whether any loopholes need plugging or procedural hurdles must be overcome, without prejudice to due process and a fair trial.

21. While exercising due caution in disseminating "press notes" issued by terrorist groups, the press must also be vigilant against being used for official plants. The media cannot be anybody's handmaiden or cat's-paw. Credibility is vital.

22. Apart from spot news, far more investigatory and analytical reporting and writing is required to portray the human tragedy being enacted in Punjab and acts of courage and camaraderie by ordinary citizens and communities who have resisted threats and murderous assaults and refused to yield ground or give up their convictions. The social, economic, political and religious aspects of the struggle in Punjab must be understood and highlighted.

23. The media will have less to fear if its coverage is balanced and honest. True professionalism is respected by all, even one's opponents. There is no other code the Committee would prescribe. Anything less would be incomplete anything more unnecessary.

24. Both Radio and TV in J&K must be brought up to the requisite staff strength with additional personnel and equipment being sanctioned to the extent necessary. The whole gamut of measures regarding security, facilities, incentives and insurance mentioned with reference to the print media apply equally to broadcast personnel.

25. There is scope for far more imaginative broadcast programming over both radio and television, whether from Srinagar and Jammu or from Delhi. The broadcast media can be used to open a wider dialogue on local grievances, factors underlying alienation, and even some of the issues posed by the militants. A bold policy decision is needed and will have to be taken by the Government of Delhi.

26. There is every reason to extend all facilities to the international media to cover developments in J&K. The bundling out of the foreign press from Srinagar in January 1990 was a mistake. An open door policy will pay dividends in winning over international public opinion despite fears of motivated reporting on the part of some.

27. The Kashmir authorities should be able to put across their point of view or rebuttals, which the local press may be unwilling to carry, through special bulletins over Radio Kashmir and Doordarshan in Srinagar.

28. Additionally, the Government should consider the use of non-conventional media such as posters, wall papers and picture boards which would be read and which would still make a point even should they be torn down by militant groups.

29. An effort should be made to reopen the cinemas and at least one cinema house could be reopened with appropriate security for a start.

30. AIR has mounted some programmes to counter POK and Pakistan Radio and TV propaganda aimed at J&K. This effort needs to be enlarged and diversified through various media. Independent video newsmagazines could also play a role in this and provide material for domestic use as well as for information abroad.

31. Inter-regional media exchange is a desirable means of enabling journalists from J&K to travel and work in various parts of the country and, conversely, of promoting a better understanding of Kashmir among journalists from the rest of India. To this end, the J&K administration should encourage professional media associations to hold sessions in the State.

32. None of this may be possible on a structured basis without the fashioning of an overall media strategy which has to be part of the nation's Kashmir policy not only in telling the security story but a great deal else besides. Inputs for this must come from diverse sources within and outside the State. The Media Spokesman we recommend should be the focal point of such a media strategy planning group.

33. The Press Council should consider the possibility of holding a session in Srinagar this coming autumn to establish rapport with all sections of the press in Jammu and Kashmir and underline its strong commitment to freedom of the Press in that State.

Pending Proposals for New Industries

3757. **SHRI VILASRAO NAGN-ATHRAO GUNDEWAR :** Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state: (a) the number of proposals from Gujarat Government for registration of new industries pending with the Union Government;